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STRAY THOUGHTS
IN VERSE AND PROSE

REGINALD LESTER LORD



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STRAY THOUGHTS
IN
VERSE AND PROSE

by
REGINALD LESTER LORD

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TO

MY MOTHER

I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THIS BOOK

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SEA SONGS

SEAWARD

Down towards the sea as the sun sinks low,
 A schooner wends her way:
And her sails are turned into burnished gold,
 As she faces the evening grey.
Her men are grouped on her fore-deck wide,
 And her Captain holds the wheel:
While their thoughts are the thoughts, that only
 Men of the sea may feel.

A gentle breeze from the ocean,
 Bellows the golden sail:
And the smoke from the galley chimney,
 Drifts over the leeward rail.
The ripples murmur under her prow,
 And the bubbles trail behind.
While the swallows dip and circle,
 On the wings of the evening wind.

THE BUOY

Oh Buoy, thou art a sentinel of the restless deep
 Thou standest at the end of every reef,
 To mark shoal water from the deep beyond,
 To guard and shelter every ship from harm.

Oh Buoy, the water swirls about the base,
 And tries to tear thee from thy moorings strong;
 We love and trust thee for thou faithful art,
 Through calm and storm.

Oh may we through all our lives
 Be like the buoy out at sea.
 Secure and calm whatever tempests rage:
 Helping to keep our comrades off life's reefs.

THE NIGHT WATCH

(AT PEACE)

Wind of a summer sea,
 So gentle, so warm, so sweet,
Laden with scent of tropic flowers,
 Stirring the sail at your feet.
And you dream in your tiny nest,
 At the top of the swaying mast,
Of coral strands where the ripples play
 And of moonlit beaches, vast.

Of daring men in white-winged ships
 Who scoured the Spanish Main;
Looting the Spaniard of his gold,
 Bringing a nation, fame.
Or your fancy takes you back
 On its wings to a bygone day:
And you seem to hear the hum of bees,
 And the smell of the new mown hay.

It seems the sound of a tinkling bell,
 Comes faintly to your ear:
And you dream of the cows that would homeward
 come,
 When the sun to the West drew near.
And so the hours pass
 While the moon sails high o'er head:
Till the grey dawn comes in the distant East,
 And the sun rises, fiery red.

THE NIGHT WATCH

(AT WAR)

At the top of a swaying mast:
Out in the wind and cold.
With hands that are chilling fast;
To the edge of your cage, you hold.

Eyes on the blackness ahead;
Searching there for a light:
Yet knowing that none you will see;
For the ships run dark at night.

Watching each breaking sea:
For a phosphorescent trail;
That may be the wake of a submarine,
Or only the work of the gale.

Light on the starboard hand?
No, it's only a star:
Just rising out of the watery waste;
But it gives your nerves a jar.

What was that gleam off there?
That came and went, so fast?
Was it that wake you are looking for,
Or the sea that's just sweeping past?

Hope against hope, fear against fear,
Knowing you must not fail:
Or the loved ones of soldiers sleeping below,
Will watch in vain for mail.

And so you search the sea:
And pray to be given sight:
To pierce the blackness and the gale;
To guide your ship through the night.

A MOONLIGHT REVERIE

After twilight comes moonlight;
 And the sea a glittering sheen:
 The wavelets gently murmuring,
 In their bed of green:
 But to-night my thoughts are wandering,
 Far across the starlit sea;
 To a half-forgotten homestead;
 And the ones who watch for me.

I can see the quaint old cottage,
 With it's back against the hill;
 And the tinkling of the meadow brook;
 Methinks, I hear it still.
 Yes, the years have brought their changes,
 And they find me all alone,
 But to-night my thoughts are turning
 To the ones who are at home.

We may fight through life's grim battles;
 We may wander where we will:
 But the thoughts of home and loved ones,
 They, will linger with us still
 And thoughts like these will strengthen;
 When the load seems hard to bear:
 For we know that they are watching,
 And we know they really care.

So let us fight on upward,
 In the face of trial and doubt:
 And the ideals they hold for us;
 Let us strive to carry out.
 Yes, to-night my thoughts are turning,
 Far across the starlit sea;
 To a half-forgotten homestead;
 And the ones who watch for me.

OTHER VERSES

TO A FRIEND

A gentle hand, a loving heart,
A voice calm, yet compelling;
Methinks I see the man thou art;
And do you mind my telling?

This verse is meant for you alone,
But should it chance to wander;
The lines that follow just below;
Can naught but do you honor.

Thou art a man who stands upright,
And faces issues squarely:
Judging your brother by his deeds,
Treating your neighbor fairly.

Thou art a man who sees beyond,
The daily fuss and flurry;
You never set yourself too high,
Or favors seek to curry.

Thou art a man whose heart is clean;
Whose will, no power can bend;
And I, who write these simple lines;
Am pleased to call you friend.

TO A NEW YEAR

Another actor passes from the stage ;
And Father Time has turned another page :
Yet fear not friend, the years that come and go ;
For life's eternal, and no years doth know.

Then lift on high your voices full of song ;
To cheer life onward, and push time along :
Strengthen your heart with deeds both kind and true ;
And speed your hand about the work you have to do.

Brood not o'er swiftly passing years ;
Such thoughts breed only doubts and fears.
Think rather of life's endless span ;
And reach on upward as becomes a man.

THANKSGIVING MEMORIES

I am sitting here a' dreaming
As the daylight fades away:
And my thoughts go hurrying backward;
To the ones so far away.
True, between us rolls an ocean,
In its vast and angry might;
But there's naught can dim the picture,
That is in my mind to-night.

I can see the homestead standing,
Near the old and hoary pine:
I can see the hills surrounding,
And the river's silvery line.
The lamplight bright is streaming,
Thorough the frosty window pane;
And the heart of me is longing,
Just to be there once again.

Yes, to-day has been Thanksgiving,
That glad day of all the year,
When around the family hearthstone,
Gather kin from far and near.
There would be my worthy grandsire,
With a babe upon his knee;
Telling stories to the kiddies,
Of the times that used to be.

There were cousins, aunts, and uncles,
Doing each his special share;
While the table stood a'groaning,
Neath the spoils of the year.
There were grapes, and nuts, and apples,
There were pies and cakes galore;
And at length through kitchen-doorway,
The smoking gobbler, mother bore.

Round the table they have gathered,
 Each one in appointed place;
 And all heads were bowed in silence
 While father said, 'The Grace':
 And then would come such feasting,
 Of the kind they used to know,
 When a fairy princess wedded,
 Or you read in 'Ivanhoe'.

Well, I've had a bit of turkey
 And a piece of pumpkin pie:
 I've had some cake and apples,
 And a few nuts on the sly.
 But no matter what I've eaten,
 Or how glad the crowd, and gay;
 It can't appease the hunger,
 That is in my heart to-day.

It's with them I'd be a'sitting,
 In the firelight's flickering glow;
 It's with them I'd be a'talking;
 As we watched the daylight go.
 But a message comes a'rushing;
 And the waves they say to me;
 "No matter where you are boy,"
 "We will ever be with thee."

U. S. S. NARRAGANSETT,

THANKSGIVING, 1918,

SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND.

THE SHRINE

Oh love, that builds a shrine in each man's heart;
Where he may worship woman, pure and free:
Come build a shrine in this poor breast of mine;
A shrine, on which to worship thee.

Not worship thee, as misers worship gold;
Or emperors their persons deify:
But worship thee, because within thyself;
The virtues of true womanhood doth lie.

THE TASK

In the world to-day, Oh Christian,
 There is work for you to do;
 There's a brother needs redemption;
 There's a sister calling you.
 They have tasted of life's sorrows
 They have shed true tears of grief,
 And for them there's no tomorrow,
 Lest you come and bring relief.

So don't stand beneath a steeple,
 With your worship all in mind,
 But go out among the people,
 And a noble duty find.
 Stretch a loving hand to someone,
 Who has faltered on the way;
 Thinking not what others have done,
 Caring not what people say.

Teach them of a love forgiving,
 That prevades the Master Mind;
 Show them all the joys of living,
 And the beauties they may find.
 Guide their footsteps ever higher;
 Towards a life that knows no end.
 Work with strength that never tires,
 Be a true, whole-hearted friend.

By these acts, Oh Christian brother,
 All your life will sweeter grow;
 For the heart that loves another,
 Can no sense but pleasure know.
 And when you pass the portal,
 Into life that lies beyond:
 You will join a band immortal,
 And a voice will say, "Well done."

SUNSET

There comes an hour twixt light and dark;
When every shadow seems to start
And stand out clear against the light:
As if to welcome the coming night.

The mountains in their splendor lie;
Clearly defined against the sky:
While round their peaks, yet hanging low;
There lingers the golden afterglow.

Smoke from tidy farms arise;
To mingle with the sunset skies;
While far above some wooded height;
Wheels the eagle in his flight.

The god of wind now gently breathes;
And stirs the slumbering forest leaves.
The birds wing slowly to their nests;
The world sinks down to slumber and to rest.

TO THE STATE OF MAINE

Here's to the glorious State of Maine;
With its woods and its purling streams:
With its bracing air, and its landscape fair;
With its lakes where the sunlight gleams.

Here's to the friends whose hearts are true:
With them would I northward hie:
And there we would dwell, in some pine-fringed dell;
And let the years roll by.

A'DOWN THE YEARS

A'down the years your face will linger,
As I saw it long ago:
With its wreath of windblown ringlets;
With its eyelids drooping low.
And though I now no longer
Feel the sunshine of your smile;
Yet the memory's growing dearer,
As I pass each earthly mile.

A'down the years your kiss will burn dear,
As it did that autumn day;
When you told me that you loved me;
And the shadows fled away.
But the wheel of life keeps turning,
And to-night we're far apart;
For the acts of men had raised up
Barriers that we might not start.

And so we are a'drifting;
Each along his separate way;
But within my heart's a'longing;
That the paths will meet some day.
But should my hope prove idle,
And my dream at length depart,
A'down the years you'll be enshrined dear,
Deep within my heart of hearts.

SHORT STORIES

THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER OF ST. PIERRE

It was nearly dark. From the lonely, wind-swept island of St. Pierre, came the shrill cries of nesting gulls as they came swooping, in ever increasing numbers from off the grey Atlantic. At the foot of the brown and beetling cliffs, in which they had their home, moaned the ever restless sea, as it flung its waters up their slimy faces. The few stunted pines which topped the highest ridge, sighed mournfully, now bending their branches till they swept the needle-covered rocks, now throwing them skyward as if in appeal to the swiftly flying scud overhead. Over the rock-ribbed reef that stretched away northward from St. Pierre, broke mountainous waves, their crests startingly white in the grey dusk. At the end of the reef stood a tall granite lighthouse, not new, but old and battlescarred, from many encounters with wintry gales.

Yes, it was a wild and lonely spot indeed, but the heart of the lighthouse keeper was glad as he climbed the rickety stairs to the lantern tower; for tomorrow would come the lighthouse tender and carry him home, after his long four months vigil on this wind-swept island. And so he sang as he lighted the lantern, an old sea song he had learned many years ago on a codfisherman;

‘Oh the wind moans drear, and the sea rolls high,
And the sky is grey with sorrow;
But what care I for wind and wave,
For I’ll be home tomorrow.’

Several large gulls perched gloomily on the railing, which surrounded the lantern tower, seemed to mock him as they flapped dismally away in the dusk, but he laughed at their wierd cries, and hummed a second verse as he prepared his frugal supper, while the old tower rocked and swayed in the increasing gale. But his thoughts were far away as he packed his few belongings, and ransacked his mind to think what he would carry home to the wife and child who would be waiting for him at the cottage gate.

He was suddenly startled from these pleasant reveries, by the sound of falling glass. What could it be? Was it possible that some bird had been swept against the lantern? Wildly he rushed up the old stairway and shoved open the trap door at the top, only to be met by a burst of flame that blinded him and drove him down again. Time after time he tried to reach the tower, only to be driven back, scorched and suffocating. What could he do? He realized he was trapped.

To try and put out the fire would be useless, for already it had eaten through the thin dry boards above and was reaching for him with long, red fingers. To try and reach shore was equally hopeless with the sea running as it was, but it was his only chance. He could not get to his boat, as that was suspended from the railing above. He must swim and he must be about it quickly for firebrands were dropping around him. Quickly he opened the door in the side of the house, admitting a gust of wind, that nearly took him off his feet, and sent the flames roaring upward. As he looked down at the boiling chaldron of water below, he hesitated, but only for an instant, then seizing a coil of rope, he fastened it to the table, braced the table against the door and let himself slide slowly over the sill till he was lost to view.

Grey dawn came over St. Pierre. The pine trees still sighed dismally to each other, the waves still flung themselves up the faces of the beetling cliffs and the gulls, awakening, swooped in ever-increasing circles in search of their breakfast, yet seemed to hesitate over a spot of rocky beach, on which lay the form of a man, his body inert, his arms flung out towards the mainland in a gesture of appeal, and it seemed as if the gulls circling onward sang to themselves;

‘Oh the wind moans drear, and the sea rolls high,
And the world goes on its way;
But what cares he for wind and wave,
His soul is home to-day.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

It was Christmas eve. In the dark study, lit only by the open fire, sat an old man. He was dressed in a well-worn suit of black, and as he stared at the crackling logs he kept stroking a scraggy, grey beard which covered the lower part of a thin, sad face. Christmas meant little to him, for his practice had shrunk to a few old decrepits and the vivacious girl whom he had married long ago when in medical school had grown tired of his company and departed carrying with her their infant son. As he gazed into the flickering fire-light he longed for that son to brighten his declining years.

These melancholy thoughts were rudely dispelled by the sharp ring of the telephone across the room. Sighing deeply the old doctor rose and answered it. "Hello. Yes, this is Dr. Noyes. Who? A strange young man? 226 Franklin Road? All right, I'll come at once." Slowly, with fingers that trembled at times he picked up a worn medicine case, took his hat and coat from the old butler and departed down the long, narrow road leading away from town. As the doctor plodded along the frozen roadway he occasionally raised his head and looked at the stars which glittered above him like diamonds in a dark setting and then returning his eyes to the way before him, he would shake his head and mutter to himself, "I wonder where he is?"

At the end of fifteen or twenty minutes he found himself at his destination, a low rambling farmhouse of the old colonial type banked on either hand by large barns. A motherly looking woman of about fifty years with hair beginning to grey about the temples and attired in a huge checked apron which extended from her neck to her heels came bustling to the door in response to the summons of the brass knocker, and explaining how her son had found the stranger unconscious by the roadside, led the doctor up the steep, carpeted stairway and into a large, cheery room where an open fire crackled in the grate and a Rochester lamp with a red shade cast a deep red glow over the comfortable furnishings. The young

man on the bed appeared to be about twenty-five, but privation and exposure had placed hollows in the smooth-shaven cheeks and dark circles under the brown eyes which looked up at the doctor with a rather vacant expression.

Taking one of the limp hands from under the coverlet, the doctor seated himself by the bedside his watch in his hand.

"Don't bother Doc. Let me go," whispered the patient.

The doctor started, let the hand fall and gazed fixedly at the sufferer.

"Who are you"? he demanded in a husky voice.

"Billie Hill from nowhere in particular", came the reply with a faint smile.

The doctor relaxed, picked up the hand again and went on with his diagnosis. When the pulse and temperature had been taken he began to ask questions.

"In pain anywhere?"

"A little Doc, under my left arm."

"Let me see."

When the patient's left side was exposed to view disclosing a large dark birthmark, the doctor gazed at it as if hypnotized.

"What's the matter Doc?"

The voice seemed to bring the doctor out of his trance. "Your name can't be Hill" he muttered.

"That's what they have always called me Doc. Mother died many years ago and I was brought up by the old landlady where we were boarding and she always called me Billie Hill."

Again the doctor relaxed and rising began to open his medicine case. The boy fumbling in his coat which hung beside the bed, brought to light a small package wrapped in oil paper and took from it a soiled photograph, a lock of hair, and a ring.

"Look Doc, here's all I know about mother. She left me these."

The doctor took the articles that the boy tendered and then suddenly dropped them. "My boy! My son! I knew it," and the next instant a grey head was beside a brown one. Christmas had brought a rich gift to a sad and lonely old man.

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